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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/SINGH/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/02/2017

TAGS: PGOV KWBG EAID PTER IS

SUBJECT: SENIOR GAZA PLO LEADER: GAZANS SEE "NO FUTURE";
DAMASCUS "ANTI-CONFERENCE" THREATENS TO DIVIDE PLO

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary. PLO Executive Committee (ExComm) member Riyad al-Khudari told PolOff by phone that Hamas has built a mini-state in Gaza with strong security forces, and cannot be effectively challenged if Gazans are too desperate to consider political alternatives. He said the near-total closure of Gaza has benefited Hamas, whose core supporters are the religious poor who do not need the crossings. Al-Khudari said Gazans are increasingly out of the job market altogether and survive on family support or international humanitarian assistance, without hope for the future. Rejectionist factions' planned "anti-conference" to rival the Annapolis meeting will undermine the PLO if held, al-Khudari said, destroying PLO discipline and undercutting the status of PA President Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). End summary.

Al-Khudari: Hamas Unshaken by
Demonstrations, Benefits from Closure

¶2. (C) PLO ExComm member Riyad al-Khudari (Independent) said Hamas has built a mini-state in Gaza with strong security forces, and it cannot be effectively challenged as long as Gazans are too desperate to consider political alternatives. He said the near-total closure of Gaza has hurt businessmen and reduced moderates' contacts with the international community, but it has benefited Hamas, whose core supporters are the religious poor who do not need the crossings. He said GOI restrictions on students' travel abroad for university studies and U.S./EU exchange programs will deprive universities of fresh ideas and likely increase radicalism.

¶3. (C) Al-Khudari estimated that only 10-15 percent of Gazans are members or supporters of Hamas, but they form a disciplined group who will not shift their loyalties no matter how desperate conditions become in Gaza. He said Hamas pays full salaries to its security forces and stipends/benefits to its supporters from unknown (presumably foreign) sources. He added that Hamas does not exhibit signs of financial stress despite Gaza's dismal economic situation.

"No Tomorrow for People in Gaza"

¶4. (C) Al-Khudari said Gazans are increasingly out of the job market altogether and survive on family support or international humanitarian assistance. He said most Gazans see no hope for the future, have no faith in the PA or the peace process, and are uninterested in the agendas of Fatah or Hamas.

Al-Khudari: "Anti-Conference" Will

Undermine PLO; Factions to Delay Mtg

¶ 15. (C) Rejectionist factions' planned "anti-conference" to rival the Annapolis meeting will undermine the PLO if held, al-Khudari said, destroying PLO discipline and undercutting the status of Abbas as PLO Chairman and the ExComm as the PLO's chief policymaking body. Al-Khudari said Abbas' PLO emissaries persuaded Syria to delay a planned "anti-conference," but opposition factions plan to hold the meeting in late November. He said the "anti-conference" should be met by a strong Annapolis statement that Palestinians will see as a breakthrough on core issues.

WALLES